

Foreign Opinion Note

United States Information Agency
Washington, D.C. 20547



Office of Research

May 11, 1983

PUBLIC OPINION ON SOME WILLIAMSBURG SUMMIT ISSUES

USIA-commissioned national public opinion surveys taken during April in the participating countries, except Canada, show:

THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC SITUATIONPUBLIC CONCERNS: Pessimism Abounds.

Everywhere, majorities consider their country to be in poor economic health. The figures for Italy (89%), France (80%) and Japan (67%) are particularly striking.

Jobs, by far, rank as the biggest economic concern in Europe. And large majorities foresee no appreciable drop in unemployment in the coming year.

Expectations for economic growth are predominantly bleak, except in Britain. There a plurality expects it to be higher a year from now.

Overwhelmingly, deficits are considered a serious problem. Only in France, however, does prevailing opinion endorse reducing government deficits at the expense of cuts in social welfare benefits.

PROBLEMS FOR THE U.S.: U.S. Premises Questioned

Recognition of the ongoing U.S. recovery lags. The West German and Japanese publics predominantly perceive the U.S. economy as ailing. British as well as French opinion is divided.

Outside of Italy, Europeans tend to lack confidence in wise U.S. leadership to solve global economic problems. Significantly, in Japan confidence prevails.

Only in Japan and in Britain, the U.S. is largely seen as cooperative in solving bilateral economic problems. Elsewhere, the opposite image exists. Moreover, in all countries U.S. economic policies tend to be perceived as more harmful than helpful to their own country.

OPPORTUNITY FOR THE U.S.: Fertile Soil for Economic Cooperation

Very large majorities believe their economic health depends on the state of the U.S. economy.

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TRADE

PUBLIC CONCERNS: Imports Are Evil.

By very substantial margins, European publics view imports as costing jobs rather than reducing domestic prices. In fact, competition from imports is seen as the first or second leading cause of current unemployment.

PROBLEMS FOR THE U.S.: Some Obstacles to Free Trade

Italians excepted, publics perceive the U.S. as impeding their country's sales of manufactured products to the U.S. market. Still Japan is considered much more culpable on this score.

West European public opinion decisively favors agricultural subsidies to prevent sales losses of their farm products abroad. And except in Britain, the U.S. is perceived as uncooperative on such sales to third countries.

The link between their own prosperity and the economic well-being of developing countries is widely recognized. Only one in 10, however, sees industrial world trade barriers as a major cause for the poorer countries' economic plight.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR U.S.: Protectionism Rejected

Public opinion everywhere widely endorses free trade principles over restrictive practices.

Contrary to their own preferences, the Japanese predominantly see their own government as favoring trade restrictions.

Some three Japanese in four agree that liberalizing agricultural imports would lower food prices. The public also favors liberalization but by a much narrower margin because of concern for Japanese farmers.

EAST-WEST ECONOMIC RELATIONS

PROBLEMS FOR U.S.: Divergent Assumptions

With respect to Soviet trade, the interests of their own country and those of the U.S. are widely perceived as dissimilar. In keeping with these perceptions, the U.S. is generally considered uncooperative on Soviet trade.

Outside of France, West Europeans clearly believe that more trade with the Soviet Union will reduce East-West tensions rather than increase their vulnerability to Soviet political pressure. The French are divided and uncertain about this.

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On selling advanced technology to the Soviet Union, opinion is mixed. The Japanese and British public tend to favor restrictions, Italians tend to oppose them and the French and Germans are split on the issue.

OPPORTUNITY FOR THE U.S.: Little Support for Going It Alone

Sentiment for coordinating Soviet trade policy with the U.S. over making separate deals prevails everywhere, except in Italy. Public support for coordinated policies, even at the risk of losing some trade, is particularly pronounced in Japan.

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N-5/11/83